

UC Merced Medical Education Program on Track; Let's Make it Happen

By Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi

Note: Today at the University of California Regents meeting in San Francisco, UC President Mark Yudof directed his staff and UC Merced to immediately proceed with orchestrating Lt. Governor John Garamendi's plan for an accelerated medical education program at UC Merced.

In early January I proposed an accelerated medical education program at the University of California Merced designed to prepare high quality doctors and nurses for the San Joaquin Valley. Today at the UC Regents' meeting, President Yudof set in motion a process to create the medical education program at UC Merced.

The accelerated program is one major step that must be taken to address the serious health care problems of the San Joaquin Valley, where the state's highest childhood asthma rates, premature births and serious shortage of medical services exist. The valley has 31 percent fewer primary care doctors, 51 percent fewer specialists, and nurses than California as a whole. An estimated \$845 million dollars is lost annually in the region when Central Valley patients drive out of the area to get their medical care.

Unlike the other five UC medical schools where research competes with clinical practice, UC Merced's priority should be educating and preparing new doctors and nurses to fill the needs of the valley. Entering freshman recruited from San Joaquin Valley high schools, and beyond would immediately begin their medical education. The program would run year round with no summer vacations. In the lower division the class work would be the same for students intending to become nurses or doctors. The upper division would divide the students into a nursing track and a MD track. The program would be fully integrated with the regional community colleges.

In just three years the nursing students and medical students could graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree. For students on the MD track all the course work necessary to enter clinical rotations in the surrounding hospitals and clinics would be completed. That would put them two

to three years ahead of the traditional path. Following the clinical rotations students would be directed to the excellent hospitals and clinics in the area for their residency work.

UC Merced which already has many of the courses for the first two years of the program, could expand its program by tapping into the resources currently provided by community colleges in the region. The cost should be similar to the normal cost of education of undergraduates. The labs and facilities are already at UC Merced, at the UC San Francisco medical complex in Fresno, and in many of the surrounding community colleges.

There is a great need in the San Joaquin Valley for specialized research on community health, public health and diseases more often found in the Valley. This type of research is not expensive and can be the unique and valuable service of UC Merced. As the UCM campus grows and matures, the medical and nursing programs can follow the path of other UC medical schools and develop into world-class research institutions.

Let's empower UC Merced to become a magnate school offering the most cost-effective high quality medical education in the nation, while at the same time offering homegrown solutions to the valley's health care crisis. It's time for the valley to heal itself.